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Message Text

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50
ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 OMB-01 SCCT-01 SY-04 IO-10 EB-07

USSS-00 AID-05 NIC-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 NEAE-00 /095 W
---------- 111566
P R 310937Z JAN 75
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2642
INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY TUNIS
USINT BAGHDAD BY POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 1443

LONDON FOR LAMBRAKIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PLO, XF
SUBJ: PLO EFFORT TO PROJECT ANTI-TERRORIST IMAGE

REF: BEIRUT 1217

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SUMMARY: IN OUR VIEW, LATEST EFFORTS BY PLO INFORMATION

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OFFICIALS TO "PROVE" THAT FEDAYEEN MOVEMENT ACTS RESPONSIBLY IN DEALING WITH PALESTINIAN TERRORISM LEAVE MANY QUESTIONS UNANSWERED. BASIC PROBLEM STEMS FROM FACT THAT PLO LEADERSHIP--FOR VARIOUS COMPELLING REASONS-- STILL CANNOT BRING ITSELF TO DISOWN (MUCH LESS PUNISH) ALL RPT ALL PERPETRATORS OF TERRORIST ACTS CARRIED OUT IN NAME OF PALESTINIAN CAUSE. END SUMMARY.

1. DEPT WILL HAVE NOTED WIRE SERVICE REPORTS THAT PLO INFORMATION OFFICIALS CONDUCTED GROUP OF FOREIGN JOURNALISTS JAN 29 ON TOUR OF PLO "CORRECTION CENTER" LOCATED SOME 15 KMS FROM DAMASCUS. ACCORDING TO VARIOUS ACCOUNTS, JOURNALISTS WERE SHOWN A DILAPIDATED BUILDING IN WHICH APPROXIMATELY 70 PERSONS WERE BEING DETAINED, TEN TO EACH "CELL" DESCRIBED AS ABOUT 5 METERS SQUARE. PLO OFFICIALS REPORTEDLY TOLD JOURNALISTS THIS WAS LARGEST PLO PRISON BUT ADDED THAT "THERE ARE MANY SUCH CENTERS ALL OVER ARAB WORLD". THEY ALSO URGED JOURNALISTS TO VERIFY THAT "PLO'S STATED INTENTION TO BRING ALL PALESTINIAN CRIMINALS TO JUSTICE IS NOT AN EMPTY PROMISE".

2. JOURNALISTS REPORTEDLY TALKED TO TWO PRISONERS, SHAWQAT YUSUF AND YUSUF HASSAN, WHO WERE IDENTIFIED AS LEADERS OF FIVE-MAN TEAM APPREHENDED IN AN ABORTED HI-JACKING OPERATION AT DUBIA ON AUG 19, 1974. PLO OFFICIALS CLAIMED THE TWO WERE SERVING SENTENCES OF FIFTEEN YEARS EACH, AND THAT THEIR ACCOMPLICES WERE SERVING SENTENCES OF 7 TO 10 YEARS. THE ADDED THAT RINGLEADER OF THE AUG 1974 DUBAI OPERATION, FATAH DISSIDENT AHMED ABD AL GHAFFOUR (ABU MAHMOUD), HAS BEEN ASSASSINATED IN BEIRUT SEVERAL MONTHS AGO. ACCORDING TO PLO OFFICIALS, THESE MEN COMPRISED FIRST AND ONLY GROUP OF HIJACKERS (OR WOULD-BE HIJACKERS) TO HAVE BEEN HANDED OVER TO PLO FOR TRIAL AND PUNISHMENT. (COMMENT: WOULD APPEAR THAT IT WAS THESE MEN, NOT THOSE WHO LATER HIJACKED VC-10 FROM DUBAI AND WERE CAPTURED IN TUNIS LAST NOV 23, WHO WERE REFERRED TO IN JAN 25 WAFA STATEMENT REPORTED REFTEL.)

3. PLO OFFICIALS TREATED JOURNALISTS TO LENGTHY EXPOSITION OF PLO "CRIMINAL CODE", ITEM 125 OF WHICH ALLEGEDLY CONFIDENTIAL

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STIPULATES THAT PERPETRATORS OF ANY HIJACKING OPERATION NOT APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY PLO LEADERSHIP WILL BE PUNISHED. JOURNALISTS WERE ALSO TOLD THAT "FROM NOW ON ANY HIJACKINGS (WE PRESUME UNAUTHORIZED ONES) WILL MEAN DEATH FOR THE PREPETRATORS".

4. PLO OFFICIALS ALSO TOLD JOURNALISTS THAT PLO HAD RE-QUESTED IRAQI GOVT TO HAND OVER PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR

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LATEST INCIDENT AT ORLY AIRPORT, BUT THAT THIS REQUEST HAS GONE UNHEEDED. (WE NOTE UNCONFIRMED REPORT IN JAN 30 ISSUE OF INDEPENDENT BEIRUT DAILY, AL BAYRAQ, THAT ORLY TERRORISTS HAVE ALREADY BEEN HANDED OVER IN BAGHDAD TO PFLP, WHICH ALLEGEDLY SET THEM FREE JAN 28.)

5. COMMENT: WE UNDERSTAND THAT PLO INFORMATION OFFICIALS HERE--FOLLOWING JAN 25 WAFA ANNOUNCEMENT REPORTED PARA 1 REFTEL--HAD COME UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE FROM FOREIGN NEWSMEN TO LIVE UP TO THEIR PROMISE TO PROVIDE MORE DE-TAILED INFO RE PLO'S CLAIM TO HAVE PUNISHED "DUBAI HI-JACKERS". EXCURSION TO DAMASCUS DESCRIBED ABOVE APPARENTLY TOOK PLACE AS RESULT. HOWEVER, IT PROMISES TO RAISE MORE QUESTIONS THAN IT ANSWERED, SINCE PLO HAS YET TO ADMIT OR DENY VALIDITY OF PRES. SADAT'S CHARGE THAT VC-10 HIJACKERS ARE STILL BEING HELD WITHOUT PUNISHMENT IN LIBYA. MORE-OVER, FATE OF SEVEN OTHER TERRORISTS "RECAPTURED" AT TUNIS (FIVE ROME AIRPORT ATTACKERS RANSOMED FROM CAIRO AND TWO BOAC HIJACKERS FREED BY NETHERLANDS) REMAINS UNKNOWN. IN ADDITION, CONFUSION STILL EXISTS OVER FATE OF 8 KHARTOUM TERRORISTS WHO AT LAST REPORT REMAINED IN EGYPTIANS HANDS, NOT TO MENTION OVER WHERABOUTS OF RABAT SUMMIT TERRORISTS RELEASED BY MOROCCAN AUTHORITIES AND OF OTHER PALESTINIAN TERRORISTS WHOSE RELEASE WAS EXTORTED FROM VARIOUS EUROPEAN AND OTHER GOVTS OVER PAST TWO YEARS OR MORE.

6. GENERAL CONFUSION OVER THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS IS DOUBTLESS SHARED BY PLO INFORMATION OFFICIALS. LATTER APPARENTLY ARE UNDER ORDERS TO PROJECT IMAGE OF PLO "RESPECTABILITY" TO FOREIGN NEWSMEN, WHOSE UNFLAGGING INTEREST IN THIS SUBJECT IS BEING INCREASINGLY WHETTED BY TORTURED PRONOUNCEMENTS EMANATING FROM FEDAYEEN SPOKES-CONFIDENTIAL

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MEN TO DATE. FACT IS THAT SUCH SPOKESMEN ARE IN QUANDRY OVER HOW TO EXPLAIN CLEARLY WHAT KIND OF TERRORIST ACTIONS ARE "CRIMES" IN PLO'S LEGAL LEXICON AND WHAT KIND ARE NOT. THEIR QUANDRY IS COMPOUNDED BY FACT THAT (A) VARIOUS PLO LUMINARIES (E.G., SALAH KHALAF) ARE ON RECORD AS HAVING PRAISED PERPETRATORS OF PAST PALESTINIAN TERROR OPERATIONS (E.G. MINICH, KHARTOUM, RABAT) AS "HEROES", AND (B) FEDAYEEN "REJECTIONISTS" LED BY GEORGE HABASH CONTINUE TO DO SO. BASIC DIFFICULTY, IN OUR VIEW, IS THAT PLO LEADERSHIP--FOR REASONS OF INTERNAL FEDAYEEN POLITICS AS WELL AS EXTERNAL STRATEGY--CANNOT BRING ITSELF TO DISOWN (MUCH LESS PUNISH) ALL RPT ALL PER-PETRATORS OF PALESTINIAN TERRORISM. THEY FEAR THAT BY SO DOING, THEY WOULD EXTINGUISH A PSYCHOLOGICAL "FLAME" AND SURRENDER A HANDY POLITICAL TOOL THAT MIGHT AGAIN

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PROVE USEFUL TO THEIR CAUSE IN MONTHS AND YEARS AHEAD.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL LEADERS, LIBERATION FRONTS, PUBLICITY CAMPAIGNS, TERRORISTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: buchantr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BEIRUT01443
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750036-0582
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t1975014/aaaaadcq.tel
Line Count: 171
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BEIRUT 1217
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: buchantr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <19 MAY 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <30 SEP 2003 by buchantr>
Review Markings:

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US Department of State
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Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PLO EFFORT TO PROJECT ANTI-TERRORIST IMAGE
TAGS: PINS, XF, PLO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006